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ABSTRACT

Baccalaureate nursing educators have built their nursing programs on the philosophical belief that learning in the humanities is essential to prepare reflective nurses. Due to scientific advancements with expanding technology, however, the scientific focus has held prominence in nursing education. The past traditions of both medical and nursing education, characterized as mechanistic and reductionistic, are best diminished by adding liberal arts requirements to all levels of education. A study examined the current nature of the integration of the humanities within nursing courses in baccalaureate nursing education. The research design was the case study method. The selected sample was generated from 12 out of 35 generic, accredited baccalaureate nursing programs (public and private) in the Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) area. Data collection involved document examination of the missions of the institutions, nursing program philosophies, and all the nursing course syllabi for the presence of humanities learning activities; and follow-up interviews with faculty who have integrated humanities learning activities within their nursing courses. Another minimal data source entailed results from a faculty letter survey composed with the intention of capturing any humanities learning activities not explicitly included in the syllabi. Following document examination, two nursing faculty who had used humanities activities in their courses were contacted from each program, and 23 were interviewed. Findings suggest a modest occurrence of the integration of humanities learning activities within nursing courses in baccalaureate nursing education. However, 3 out of 12 institutions provided 75% of the humanities activities occurring in elective courses. The main reason cited for lack of humanities integration involves the content-driven nature of the majority of faculty and the external pressure of adhering to state board standards. Faculty interview questions are appended. (Contains 18 references and 6 figures.) (BT)

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The Current Nature of the Integration of the Humanities within Baccalaureate Nursing Education

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Introduction

Expanding complexities in health care mandate that professional nursing education be tailored to prepare nursing students to meet diversified responsibilities. A host of factors such as scientific advancements, growing clinical knowledge, expanding technology, increased client diversity, market-driven policies, managed care, and shifts from inpatient care to community outpatient settings all have contributed to the present health care delivery system (Lindeman, 2000). Given this multitude of conflicting influences, the question that emerges asks, what is the best curricular approach to ensure the development of critically reflective, humanistic professional nurses?

Baccalaureate nursing educators have built their nursing programs on the philosophical belief that learning in the humanities is essential to prepare critically, reflective, humanistic nurses. However, due to scientific advancements with expanding technology, the scientific focus has held prominence in nursing education (Valiga & Bruderle, 1997). The past traditions of both medical and nursing education characterized as mechanistic and reductionistic are best diminished by adding liberal arts requirements to all levels of education (Keeling & Ramos, 1995). Over the last thirty years some educators have argued that instead of the traditional practice of "parceling" out chunks of curriculum, efforts should be directed at methods to integrate the humanities within the nursing courses (Barker, 2000; Newell, 1989; Valiga & Bruderle, 1997).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the current nature of the integration of the humanities within nursing course in baccalaureate nursing education. Integration of the humanities has been described as one curricular approach that supports the growth of

critical thinking within a humanistic perspective and also the personal and professional development of the nursing student, goals of both baccalaureate nursing and liberal arts education. In addition, faculty perceptions on the effectiveness of achievement of these goals related to these humanities learning activities were explored. Furthermore, the understanding of the concept of critical thinking as described by nursing faculty was investigated. A humanities learning activity was defined as a learning activity developed from the discipline of history, literature, religion, philosophy, architecture, or the fine arts including music, painting, sculpture, drama or film (Valiga & Bruderle, 1997). This learning activity consisted of a distinct concept/s, teaching/learning strategy/ies and evaluation method/s.

The historical review of the integration of the humanities within baccalaureate nursing education has revealed that the spirit of the humanities has been present in nursing from its beginning (Donahue, 1985). Since the turn of the 20th century, nursing educators have embraced the goals of liberal arts education: critical thinking, humanistic perspective, personal and professional development, as essential for professional nursing (Hanson, 1989). However, how these goals have been actualized in nursing education has been mostly inconsistent and erratic.

Almost 30 years ago, Wilson (1974) asserted that when the humanities are discrete curricular courses the connections between them and the learning needs of the professional nurse remain unrecognized. Over the past 18 years some nursing educators have described the implementation of their ideas integrating the humanities within their nursing courses (Valiga & Bruderle, 1997; Vande Zande, 1995).

The literature in higher education has recommended the adoption of interdisciplinary approaches to guide curricula that foster integration (Barker, 2000; Dressel, 1978). Several effective plans have been described in the literature. Emphasis is placed not just on the content, but also "how" the content is delivered, as crucial to the effectiveness of curricular integration (Darbyshire, 1995; Peden & Staten, 1995). In discussion of "how" the content is handled, the significance of a critically, reflective educator warrants attention (Brookfield, 1987; Drake, 1976; Paul, 1993).

Recent research has investigated and current research is being conducted relative to measuring the goals of liberal arts education in higher education (Facione, et al., 1995). Little research exists relative to measuring the achievement of liberal arts goals in nursing education (Zaborowska, 1995). Hagerty and Early (1993) reported from their research that students failed to make the connections between their liberal arts courses and their nursing courses during their educational experience. Therefore, since there has been no systematic assessment of the value of the integration of the humanities related to the achievement of liberal arts goals, this research was undertaken.

Methodology

The research design was the case study method. The selected sample was generated from 12 out of 35 generic, accredited baccalaureate nursing programs in the Philadelphia area. These institutions included public/ private institutions as classified by the Carnegie Classification (Baccalaureate College General, Masters Colleges University 1, and Research University; Intensive/Extensive). Data collection involved two main sources: 1) document examination of the missions of the institutions, the philosophies of the nursing programs, and all the nursing course syllabi for presence of humanities

learning activities: 2) follow-up faculty interviews of faculty who have integrated the humanities learning activities within their nursing courses. A third, but minimal source of data entailed results from a faculty letter survey that had been composed with the intention to capture any humanities learning activities at any level that had not been explicitly included in the syllabi.

The research questions for the study were as follows:

1) To what extent are the humanities present within nursing course in the nursing curriculum?
2) What nursing themes/concepts are associated with using the humanities?
3) What teaching/learning strategies are utilized related to these concepts?
4) What methods of evaluation are utilized to evaluate learning related to these concepts?
5) What are the expected students outcomes as perceived by the nursing faculty associated with these concepts (critical thinking, humanistic perspective, personal and professional development)?
6) Does the understanding of the critical thinking of the faculty influence the use of the humanities within nursing courses?

The first four research questions were addressed through the syllabi document examination serving as the first source of data. Prior to beginning the syllabi examination, the missions of the institutions as well as the nursing programs philosophies were reviewed. Next the category coding procedure that had been created to conduct the syllabi document examination was initiated. Starting with the first nursing course, a systematic assessment of all the nursing courses was begun. When a course was

identified that utilized a humanities learning activity such as literature (novels, poems, etc.), the course number, level, nursing concept, teaching/learning strategy, and evaluation method were recorded. Also, when a particular course was identified, the faculty name on the syllabus was noted, which served to facilitate a potential follow-up interview.

After the document examination was completed, two nursing faculty were contacted from each program who had utilized humanities learning activities in their courses and an interview was requested. A total of 23 interviews were conducted. The focused seven-interview questions (see Appendix A) were developed by the researcher guided by the literature review, which comprised the second source of data

Results

In addressing research question #1, this study has demonstrated that there is currently a modest occurrence of the integration of the humanities learning activities within nursing courses in baccalaureate nursing education with a mean of 12.33 occurrences across the undergraduate professional courses of the nursing program. However, caution must be taken in interpreting this mean since in so much as only 3 out of 12 institutions provided 75% of the humanities activities occurring in elective courses, so therefore all the students had not taken them. Furthermore, a pattern in the frequency of humanities occurrences within certain levels of courses and nursing specialties emerged. Z scores were calculated to facilitate analysis of this apparent trend. Introductory or freshman level courses exhibited the largest amount of humanities occurrences, followed by the nursing courses in the specialties of psychiatric, community, and pediatric/maternal nursing. These four areas demonstrated statistically more frequent

humanities occurrences at a significant level ($p < .05$). The medical –surgical nursing courses had the smallest number of humanities occurrences. Relative to research question #2, leadership and diversity were identified as the most prevalent concepts at 14 occurrences, followed by nursing history and grieving each at 12 occurrences, 10 occurrences for professionalism, and 9 for caring. In regards to teaching/learning strategies, research question #3, the strategy of film, including discussion based on the film, was the most employed in 83 activities followed by the use of literature (fiction, non-fiction, or historical account) at 38 occurrences. The most frequent evaluation technique, research question #4, was the discussion method at 58 occurrences.

The second main data source, faculty interview responses served to provide an accurate validation in terms of what was stated in a particular course syllabi. Additionally, research questions #5, and #6 were answered through the faculty interviews. In addressing research question #5, the 23 interviewees were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (1, the smallest; to 5, the largest) their perception on the effectiveness of the humanities learning activities in achieving the identified students outcomes. For critical thinking, a mean score of 4.31 was indicated; for humanistic perspective 4.81; for personal development a 4.20 and for professional development a mean score of 4.16 was obtained. Thus, the humanities learning activities were perceived to be highly effective in the achievement of the student outcomes as noted.

Other significant themes also emerged through these interviews. Several faculty described their motivation to employ the humanities related to the "power to engage the student in a meaningful way." Students were described as "mass media addicts" and faculty discussed that film is a highly effective way to illustrate a concept, in addition to

stimulating the different learning styles of the students. Several faculty emphasized the necessity for faculty of creating well- thought out questions to drive the critical thinking process within the student. This was stressed as a crucial component for the success of the humanities strategy. Additionally, since "the humanities provides insight into the social, spiritual, economic, and sexual nature of disease and problems, it is very worthy to include. "Science is limited- provides no insight into the human experience of a disease process".

The main reasons sited for lack of or a decreased amount of humanities integration in some areas involve the content driven nature of the majority of faculty, the external pressure of adhering to state board standards and the necessity to prepare students for success on NCLEX (National Certification Licensure Examination). Several faculty expressed that they would like to integrate more, but voiced how "time-consuming it was to develop thoughtful humanities learning activities to promote critical thinking." Additionally, since faculty rewards are tied to what they publish rather then to innovations in the classroom, this serves as another possible reason why faculty are less willing to explore and expend this effort.

In regards to research question #6, it was uncovered that the level of understanding of the concept of critical thinking as well as the philosophies of education that the faculty described were congruent with the literature findings that described attributes/dispositions associated with critical thinkers. Specific attributes such as open-mindedness, honesty, humility, analytic skills, self-reflection, moral reasoning, global flexibility, fallibility, self-disclosure, and commitment to learning were articulated. The faculty concurred that a safe, trusting classroom environment is paramount to promoting

the process of critical thinking within the student. Also, the faculty agreed that they were most responsible for creating this safe environment. Findings from the faculty survey letter, a potential third source of data, yielded little data so will not be discussed at this time.

Recommendations/Implications

Several areas for faculty development and recommendations to both higher education and nursing education have emerged from this study. The findings for this study confirm that there are nursing educators who are utilizing elements of humanities learning activities. This occurs mostly in the introductory courses. Faculty interview responses indicated that the humanities learning activities were perceived to be highly effective in the achievement of the identified student outcomes. Implications from this study involve increasing faculty awareness of the value of integrating humanities learning activities linked to the achievement of the identified liberal arts student outcomes through faculty development programs. Also the importance of strong leadership to support faculty in "trying out" innovative teaching/learning strategies is evident. Furthermore, since both the literature review and this study validate the significance of "how" the content/strategy is delivered as crucial to its effectiveness related to student learning, the continued support/development for the faculty as critical thinking instructors is recommended. The essential role that faculty play in facilitating knowledge integration across disciplines is apparent. Most students have the potential to integrate knowledge across disciplines, but only if the faculty actively assist them to do so within the classroom. Dialogue between nursing educators and the National League of Nursing and

state boards of nursing to discuss methods to assess the critical thinking abilities of nursing students relative to humanities integration is also recommended.

If it is our goal to prepare future nurses who are cognizant of the nature of the human condition and prepared to approach each patient with compassion and from the perspective of humanity as well as scientific and medical knowledge, then it is evident that this recent trend of incorporating humanizing elements into the scope and sequence of nursing education, must be encouraged and expanded.

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Appendix A

Faculty Interview Questions

1. In course_____, you chose_____ as a teaching/ learning strategy for the concept_____ with an evaluation method_____.
2. Describe your initial motivation for selecting to integrate the humanities as a teaching/learning strategy?

3. Critical thinking, humanistic perspective, and the personal and professional development of the nursing student are some of the possible student outcomes that have been identified with the integration of the humanities within nursing courses.

In general, please rate the effectiveness that the teaching/learning strategy achieved the student outcome on a scale of (1-5) with 5(largest) and 1(smallest):

Possible student outcomes:

Critical thinking (1- 2- 3- 4-5)

Humanistic perspective (1-2-3-4-5)

Personal development (1-2-3-4-5)

Professional development (1-2-3-4-5)

4. Describe your philosophy of education?
5. Describe your definition of the concept of critical thinking?
6. In your view, what specific attributes or dispositions should faculty endeavor to model for nursing students as a critical thinker?
7. Rate the effectiveness of the classroom environment on the critical thinking ability of the nursing student on a scale of (1-5) with 5 (large effect) and 1(small effect). (1-2-3-4-5)

APPENDIX B

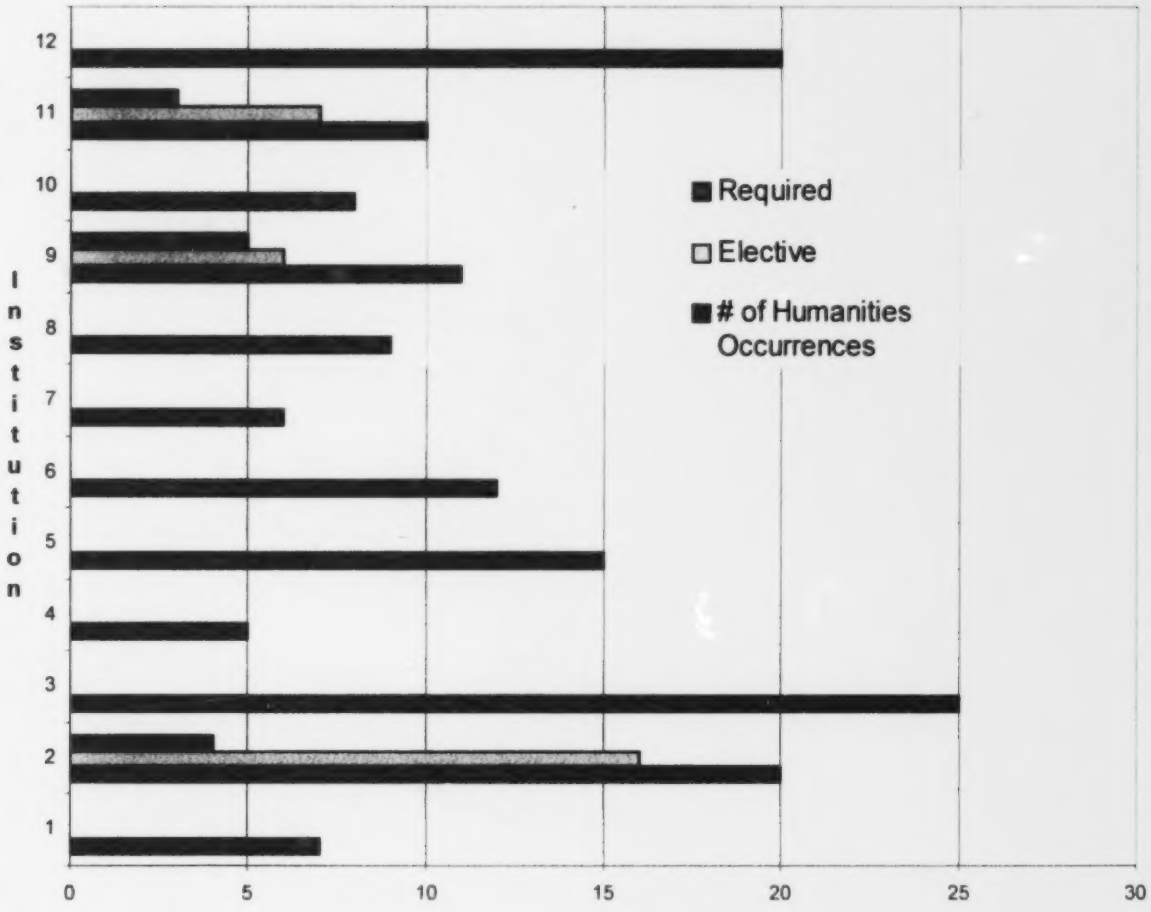

Figure 1

APPENDIX C

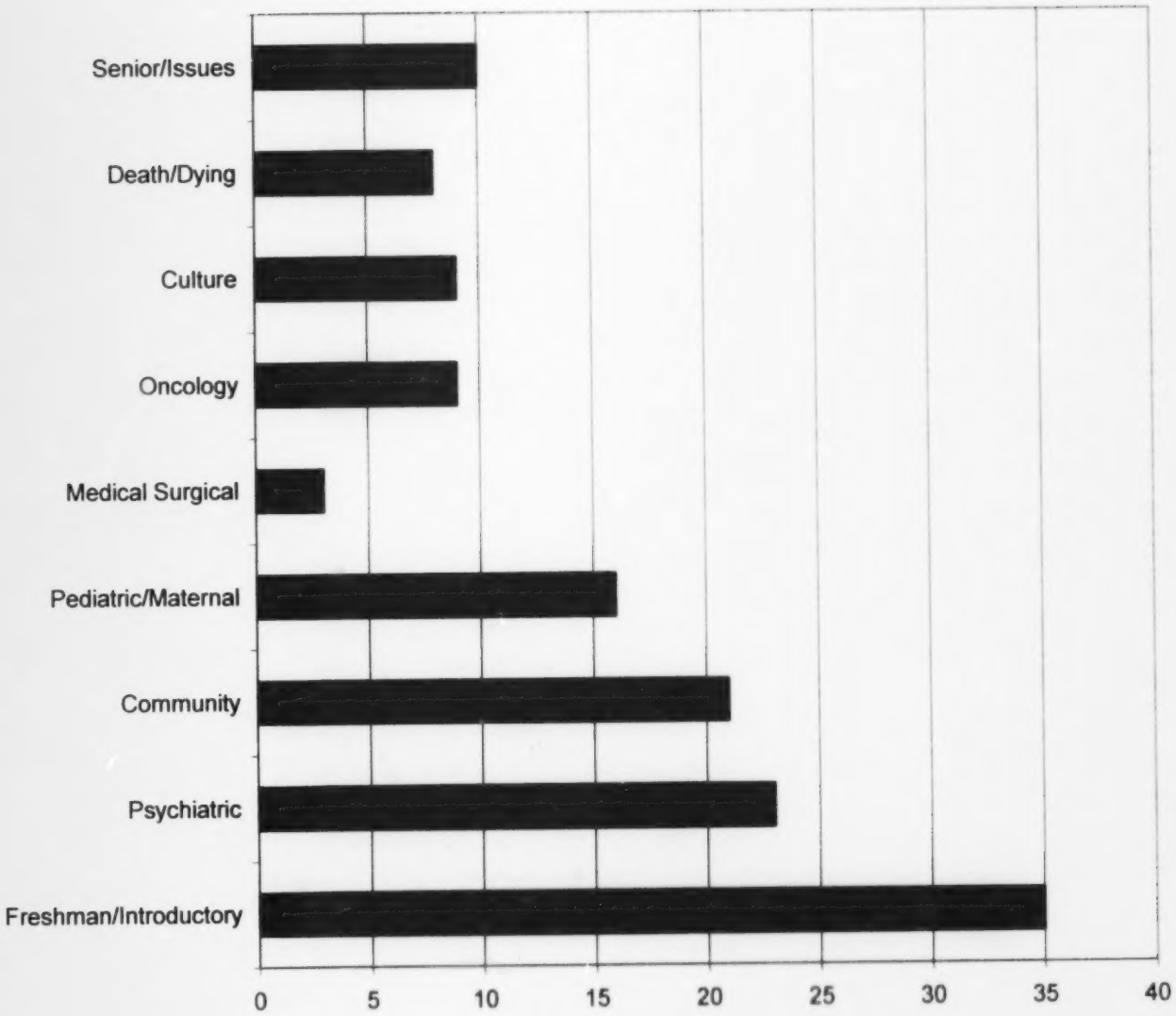

Figure 2

Frequency of Humanities Occurrences in Selected Courses

APPENDIX D

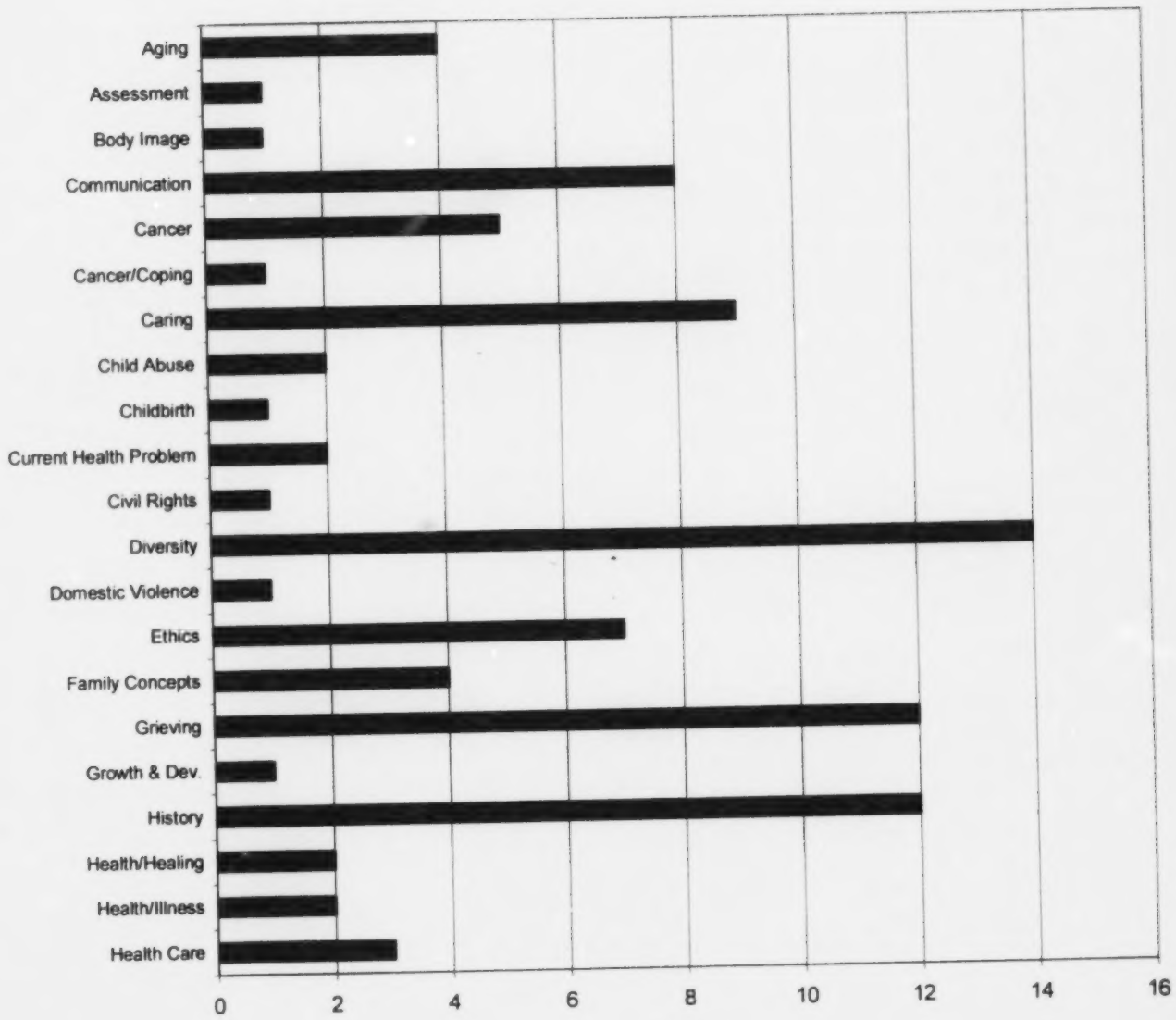

Figure 3
Concepts

APPENDIX E

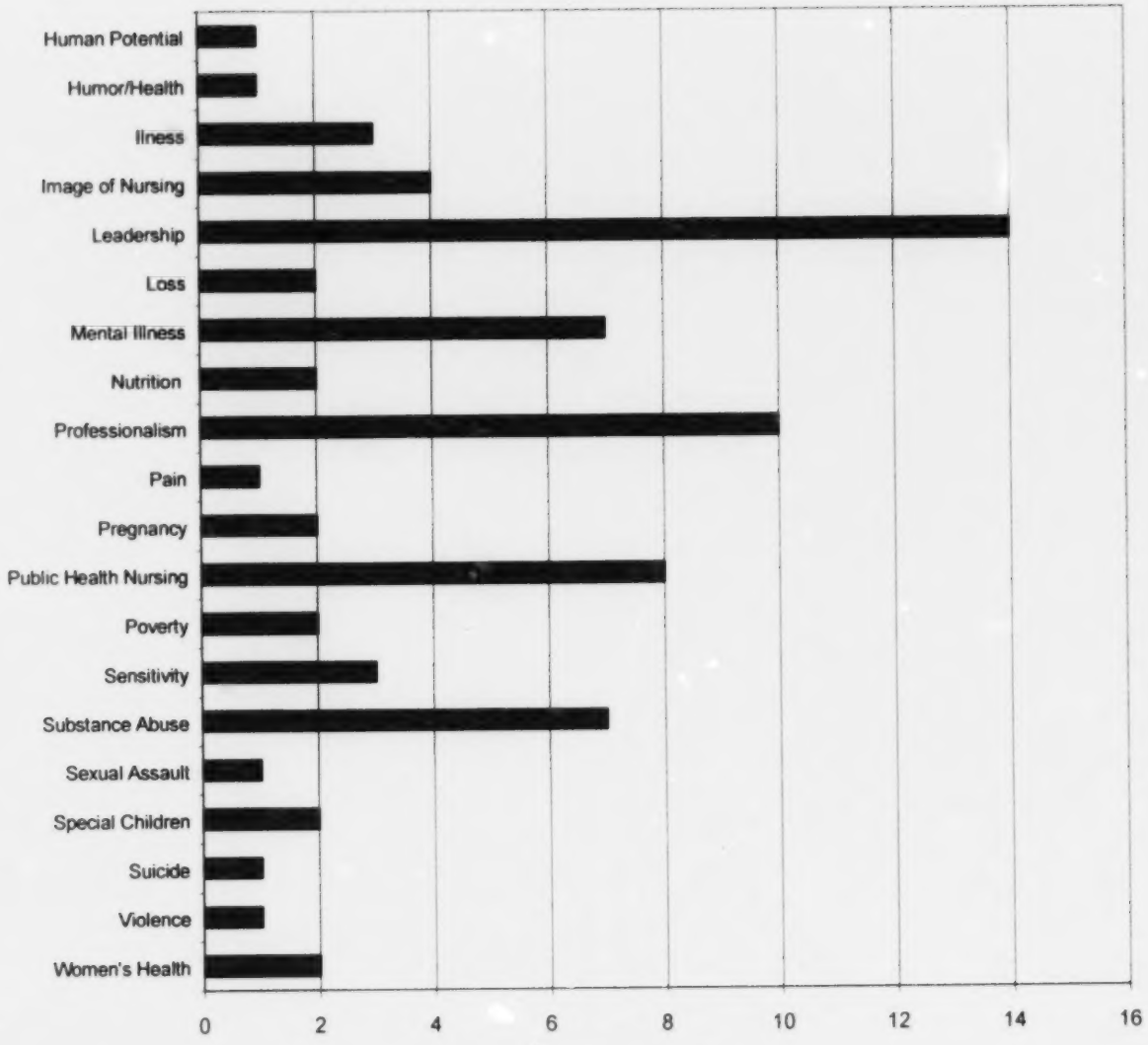

Figure 4
Concepts

APPENDIX F

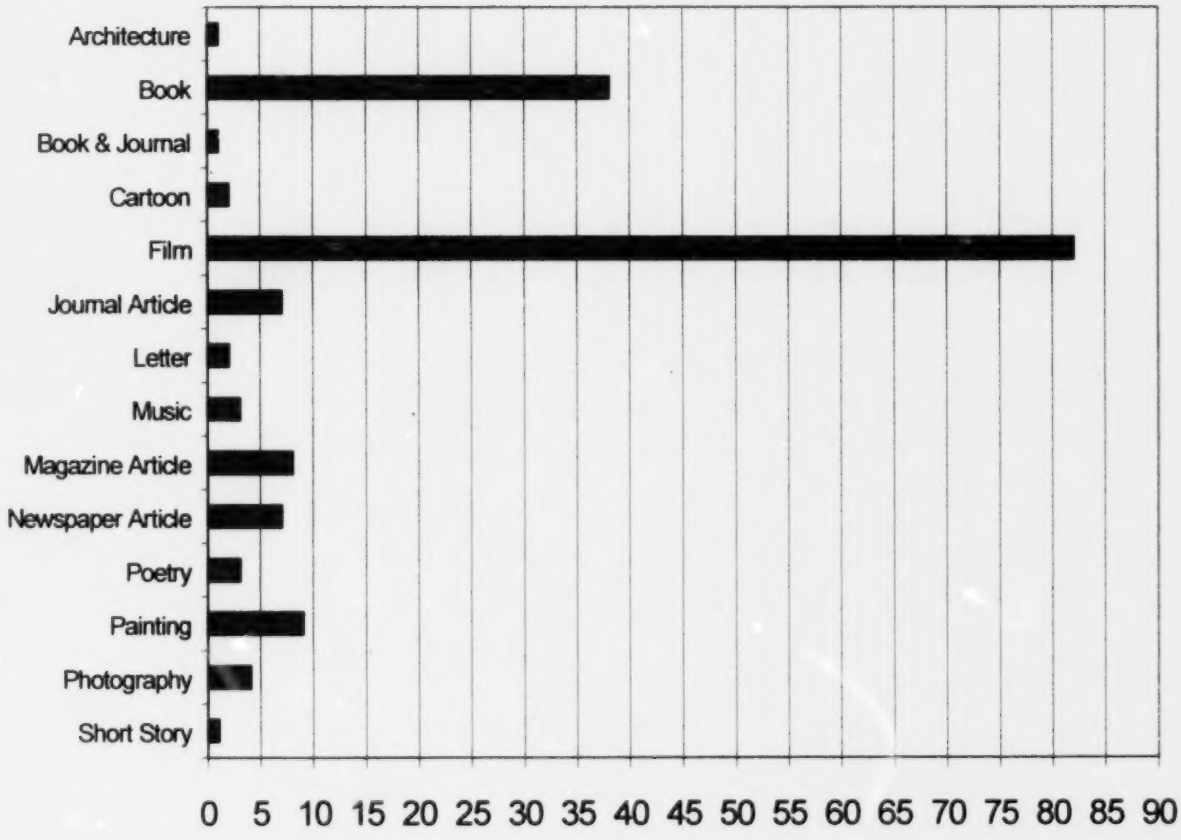

Figure 5

Strategies

APPENDIX G

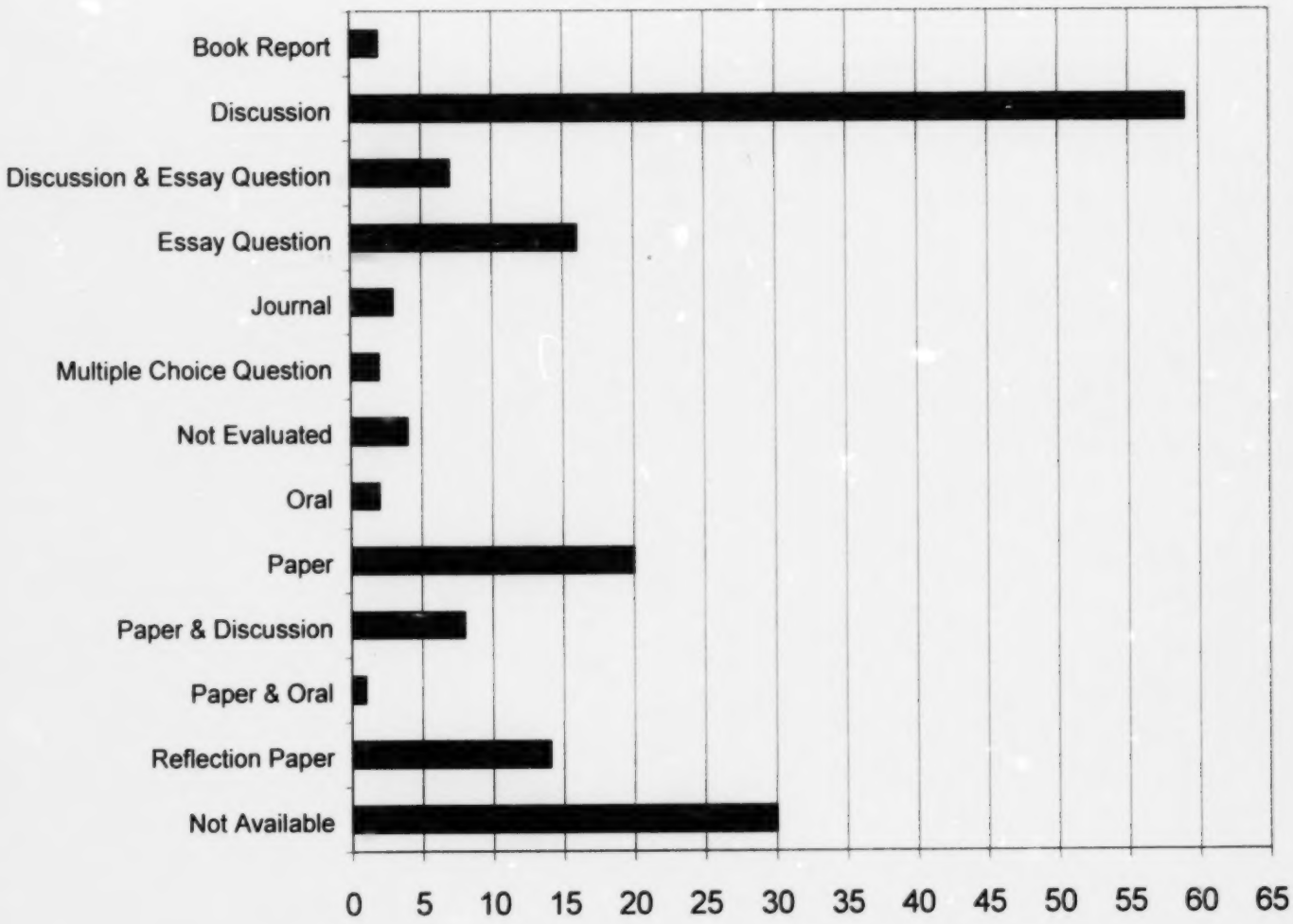

Figure 6

Evaluation Methods

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